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## The 12-Step Closing Process

By Vincent Yero, BC-HIS

Recently I was talking with a colleague of mine who was surprised to learn that I typically have little problem getting people to spend more money on a higher-end product while putting forth a similar amount of effort.

“How do you convince your customers to buy a higher end product?” He asked.

“Simple,” I replied. “I use a 12-Step process!”

“What’s that?” He asked.

“The 12-Step Process is a series of things I’ve learned over the past 20 years, but I’ve arranged them into a 12 step pattern and then I just stick to the program.”

Most of us have been thoroughly taught the basics of how to get information from the client including facts, data, and figures, via a plethora of questions and tests from otoscopy to audiometric evaluations; but how do you persuade them to purchase the high-cost product that will help them dramatically? And, how do you convince them that YOU are the right provider to see them through this decision? What you choose to say to your patients has a profound affect on if they will decide to make a purchase with you. It is important that you have a polished approach with a series of goals and that you are always “closing” the sale while working with them. The product you try to sell is only part of the package but what you say or do will ultimately determine if your patient will accept the help of better hearing and make the appropriate purchase from you.

Today many hearing healthcare professionals struggle with necessary selling skills, resulting in thousands of dollars in lost revenues annually. This is mostly due to the absence of a clear sales plan or because they have a fear of asking the tough questions to get the commitment from their customers.

***“Always do what you are afraid to do.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson***

Is there anything more frustrating than having a patient in your office suffering with bilateral hearing loss while you have a set of hearing aids that will improve their quality of life dramatically that they are not budging on their decision not to buy? At this point you might be able to hear yourself wondering, “Why aren’t they getting it? What am I doing wrong?” Chances are you are not doing anything wrong

***And therefore those skilled in war bring the enemy to the field of battle and are not brought there by him.***

***— Sun Tzu “The Art of War”***

but rather you have not mastered the art of “closing the sale” and when it comes to amplification, it can be a hard sell. Using a plan or process like “The 12-Step Closing Process” will empower you with techniques to get your patient to move in the direction you know is best for them. Becoming familiar with the process takes skill and practice, but will give your patients the impression that their appointment moved seamlessly from start to finish. The reality is that you are working diligently with a plan, moving them one step closer to the end of the appointment.

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### **Step 1 – Be Proactive and Have a plan**

Have a plan and stick to it. Expect results, but if your results are not what you hoped for then modify the plan. Doctors often use the acronym SOAP as a tool to keep the momentum of an appointment going and to ensure a meaningful encounter with the patient. This is good practice for a hearing healthcare professional as well and stands for:

**S-Subjective**; this is the most important in the process and where you learn about the patient (subject)

**O-Objective**; this is what you actually observe/discover during your interaction with the patient

**A-Assessment** ; is using your knowledge and expertise to assess the patients condition

**P-Prescription or Plan** ; as a means to correct the problem or treat the symptoms

### **Step 2 –Know the Desired End at the Beginning**

What goal do you want to achieve at the onset of the meeting? Not only should you have a goal, but it is important to understand what patient's goal is as well. Ask them why they are there in your office and what outcome do they expect from the appointment? Try and gauge at the beginning of the appointment if they are prepared to move forward with a solution if you offer one today. If not, ask why and try to get them to discuss the barriers right up front.

### **Step 3 -Relationship Building**

So much of the role of a hearing healthcare practitioner is relationship building. In fact, as soon as you greet your patient for the first time they are assessing you, your knowledge, your demeanor, and your body language. They are reading you just as much as you are reading them—this is the start of your closing process. This first step will set the tone for the appointment and how much the patient will trust you when you make a recommendation for their hearing health solution.

1. **Be Nice! Be Genuine!** Smile each time you meet someone, shake their hand firmly, and look them in the eyes and make a memorable first impression. People buy from who they like. You could have the best products in the world, but if you lack compassion and have terrible “bedside” manner, chances are your customer will probably take their business elsewhere.
2. **Stay focused and in charge.** There are times when patients take comfort in talking with you about many things unrelated to their hearing care. While it is important to show your interest in them and build a relationship, you have to try and stay on track and keep the appointment moving. You should have a first-appointment checklist and appropriately allot the time and stick to it. Keep topics light and enjoyable and avoid strong views on politics and religion that may differ from your patient's. It would be terrible to lose the customer – and the potential revenue – simply because you have different personal views.

### **Step 4- Gathering Information**

Using tools like a case history form with questions that help the patient define the trouble they are having is an excellent solution. I prefer not to make them fill out the forms but rather I ask them the questions directly which gives them an opportunity to discuss answers with you openly; helping with the relationship and building trust. Remember to make each person feel important. Even though this is routine to you, particularly during a first appointment, you want to give them your attention and make them feel important. Make this time special; remember this appointment is about them not about you. Here are some steps you can follow:

1. Using the “Compass” technique is an excellent way to explore their knowledge and perception of hearing aids. Ask probing questions to find out if they know anyone with hearing aids. You may say, “Mr. Johnson can you tell me about 2 or 3 people that you know who are using hearing instruments?” Follow the compass to discuss different areas within the patient’s life and to keep you on track:
  - a. N – Neighbors
  - b. S – Social Activities
  - c. E – Education
  - d. W – Work
2. Use open ended questions to pull out information from your patients. Open ended questions have no specific answer and can typically give you a lot of information about the patient; and how they are feeling about their hearing health. An example of an open ended question is: “Mr. Johnson, can you tell me about when you first noticed you were having some trouble communicating with your wife?”
3. On the other hand, using closed ended questions (funneling) is helpful when you want to direct them into a decision. A closed ended question has a definitive answer such as a “Yes” or “No”. An example of a closed ended question is: “Would you prefer a slim over the ear hearing aid, or a completely in the canal style?”
4. Identify “Hot” buttons. These are usually the items that they have already discussed with you either through your questioning or simply through your open dialogue with the patient. Crystallize the problems they are experiencing by asking questions like: “Tell me more about that.” or “Is that the **only** place you notice the breakdown in communication?” You could say, “Mr. Johnson, you said you’ve had trouble for three years. Did I understand that correctly?” Keep the questioning going to guide the dialogue until you get them to talk about what finally got them here. “You say you have been experiencing difficulty with your hearing for quite some time however this is your first visit to a hearing professional, so what is it about your situation that brings you here now?”
5. Once you identify the problem areas then list them back to the patient in order of importance. This lets them know that you have been listening and are able to help them with their problem. You need to appear genuinely interested.

#### **Step 5- No Shortcuts**

Do all the testing required and do not stop until you gone above and beyond and have thoroughly done all you can to get the full picture of the patient’s current hearing health. Ask yourself what it is that you do that separates you from any other professional? Going the extra mile will always show to the patient – and will likely be reflected in your revenues.

#### **Step 6 -Educate Your Patient**

Educating your patient makes you the expert. It gives them reason to believe you are the one to deal with over another professional. What can you say that will “wow” them? This is where you can use your expertise to tell them something they do not already know and will give them the confidence that you are the highly-skilled hearing professional they were looking for.

1. Audiogram Interpretation is vital to communicating your expertise. Use terms they are familiar with, not the acronyms and industry verbiage that they are not familiar with and do not understand. Give them practical answers to questions on their level.

2. Video Otoscopy gives you an opportunity to teach the patient about their ears and makes you the expert. Explain to them what it is they are looking at and ease their fears. Most of your patients will have no idea what they are looking at and walking them through what they are seeing will help.
3. Tympanometry is also a great tool and since it isn't used as frequently in all offices, could be the thing that sets you apart. Explain the graphs and let them know the difference between ear canal volume and static compliance, what the norms are, and where they fall in at based on the measurements.
4. Hearing Conservation and Noise Prevention Measures should also be explained to your patients taking them beyond the realm of just hearing aids as your field of expertise. Talk about Assistive Listening Devices and Loop systems and Bluetooth options. These are all things that can dramatically improve their quality of life.

### **Step -7 Establish Realistic Expectations**

Not only is it important to set expectations for your patients but you must also set expectations for what they will get when they visit you – and then stick to them. In today's technology-driven world, chances are your patients have already checked you out online even before coming in to see you. What does your website say about you? Do you reflect accurately what they expect from your site or what they were told when they called to set the appointment. If not, you have already pushed them in the wrong direction and will now need to work harder to get them feeling good about their decision to come to you.

*"There is no reality... only perception". Dr. Phil*

1. **DWYSYAGTD-** Do What You Said You Are Going To Do! Be careful not to set the expectations too high and don't make promises you can't keep.
2. **Pre-conceived thinking.** People that come to your office for a hearing test or services are already coming to you with expectations in their mind. It is important that you try and understand what they are before you get too far with the patient. For example, your patient may have recently sat behind someone at church with a hearing aid that whistled the entire time and they have a pre-conceived notion about hearing aids and the noisy feedback. If a patient is asking about feedback, their pre-conceived belief based on their church experience may be blocking their decision to buy aids. Finding out what they already believe about hearing aids when they walk in the office is important and can help you to get them to a decision sooner.

### **Step 8 -Handle Objections as Opportunities**

Objections are opportunities waiting to be taken. In fact, objections are excellent because they pinpoint the exact concerns your patient is having. If they ask specifically about a certain type of hearing aid, they probably have met someone with that type of aid and possibly have concerns with it. If you get them to discuss their concerns, you can address them directly and hopefully "debunk" their objection and move closer to getting them to address their hearing loss with hearing aids. Be sure to address the objection and ask if that satisfies their concerns. People bring up objections because they want to solve or resolve the issue in their mind. Handling the objection the moment it comes up is a time saver and reminds the patient you are genuinely interested and concerned about getting to a solution for them.

1. Restate the Objection in the form of a question. “You say that you cannot go ahead with getting help for your hearing problem today because (insert objection). Do I have that right? Tell me, if we found a way that would resolve that, then would you be okay with going ahead and getting help for your problem?”
2. Ask for Permission – Ask them if they have an idea of how they want to address their hearing loss based on what you have told them. If they say, “I don’t know,” then answer with, “Well I feel confident I can help improve your hearing today but I need your permission to move forward, will you give me that?” This puts the solution right in front of them and forces them to either accept or reject the help.
3. Answer Questions with a Question -- This is a good technique for turning the objection around and putting it back on the patient. For example, if price is a concern and your patient asks you how much it will cost to address their hearing loss, you can respond by saying, “Hearing aids range dramatically in price, do you have an idea in mind of what your budget is?” Their answer, even though they probably offered a lower number, gives you a place to start and also helps you understand their perception – making it easier for you to anticipate a possible roadblock.

### **Step 9 -Recruit Allies**

Every person you fit with hearing aids is a salesperson for you. If they loved the service they received from you, they will hopefully tell others. But, if they didn’t like the service they received they will absolutely share that experience with as many people as they can. When you have a successful fitting with a patient and they share their sentiments about how you have changed their life, ask them to tell others. Have your happy customers give you a written testimony that you can display in your office or on your website. A customer that walks in your door because they heard great things about you, most often will be an easier sale than someone walking in with no idea about you or what is in store for them.

### **Step 10-Closing & Mini Closes**

Keep in mind these things when dealing with your patients: What is the problem? Is the patient aware of their problem? How do I quantify it?

- P- PROBLEM** – Clearly identify the fact that they have a problem. Demonstrate clearly for them what the problem is; they need to be made aware of it.
- A- AWARE** – Help them become aware of their problem and how it can affect their life and lives of their loved ones if not addressed.
- Q- QUANTIFY** – Explain to them the importance of addressing their hearing loss and instill a sense of urgency by explaining to them the seriousness of delaying the solution. Firmly determine a course of action.

### **Step 11- Paperwork**

Having paperwork ready is important for when the patient is ready to purchase their hearing aids. These simple steps can help build trust, save time and leave less time for the buyer to reconsider.

1. Have pre-printed contracts made up with pricing and details for the most popular products.
2. Verify all the contact data and personal information with the patient to ensure it is all correct. This will help you follow up with the customer continuously.

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### **Step 12 – Reaffirm the Decision**

Now that you've made the sale, your job isn't done yet – ***you must thank them***. Shake their hand, look them in the eye, and use their name and say, "Thank you, Mr. Johnson, for letting me help you today. I'm proud of your decision to get help for yourself and your family and I look forward to our next appointment on (date and time). And remember, if you have any problem at all with your aids, please call me and we will take care of it right away." Here are some follow-up tips to help make sure they remain satisfied and will be a repeat customer:

1. Have a 48-hour check in program. Call your customer 48 hours after fitting them to check on progress, answer questions and address any concerns right away.
2. If they share a concern at any time, address it with them right away instead of waiting until their next appointment.
3. Remind them that you are an advocate for them and their hearing health is your top priority.
4. Call to confirm their follow up appointment. It is important to keep them engaged to keep their satisfaction level high and to ensure their hearing aids don't wind up in the drawer and you lose them as a purchasing customer.

Taking time to learn and apply these steps into your daily transactions will take time and effort on your part and yield high returns from your investment, if properly applied.



Author Vincent Yero, BC-HIS has been in the hearing healthcare industry for the past 20 years and now trains other hearing aid dispensing professionals through his business, Phase Seminars, LLC in Flower Mound, TX.

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# IHS Continuing Education Test

1. In gathering information (using compass conversation starters), NSEW is an acronym for which topics?
  - a) Never, Sometimes, Every time, With help
  - b) Neighbors, Social Activities, Education, Work
  - c) Name, Source, Eligibility, Wants
  - d) Networking, Specialty, Education, Work
2. When setting realistic expectations, you should deliver what you and your website has promised, as well as:
  - a) Suggest a second appointment for answering more in-depth questions.
  - b) Assure patients that you can deliver anything your competitor has promised.
  - c) Discover you patient's pre-conceived notions about hearing aids.
  - d) All of the above
3. Closing begins...
  - a) Once you have the test results
  - b) The moment someone meets you
  - c) After gathering patient information
  - d) When the customer knows you're serious
4. When handling objections, you should always...
  - a) Use funneling techniques
  - b) Use mini-closes
  - c) Use close-end questions
  - d) Pinpoint objections and put them to rest
  - e) All of the above
5. When handling objections, its always best to...
  - a) Repeat the objection back in the form of a question
  - b) Avoid talking about the objection
  - c) Change the subject
  - d) Re-educate the member on why they are in your office
6. What does the 'Q' stand for in the P-A-Q?
  - a) Quality
  - b) Quantity
  - c) Quantify
  - d) Qualify
7. What does the 'A' stand for in the P-A-Q?
  - a) Action
  - b) Aware
  - c) Avoidance
  - d) Ability
8. Objections are:
  - a) Opportunities waiting to be taken
  - b) Are excellent because they pinpoint the patients' exact concerns
  - c) An item on the mental checklist
  - d) All of the above
9. Educate Your Patient ; of the 12-Step Closing Process & Handling Objections states that, when you are explaining the results of an audiogram, you should always...
  - a) Educate member & give practical answers to questions
  - b) Endorse the need for help, creating ownership and acceptance of problem
  - c) Set realistic goals
  - d) All of the above
10. Step 3- Relationship Building; of the 12 Step Closing Process & Handling Objections suggests when you meet someone you should:
  - a) Be personable, not personal
  - b) Be Nice, and be genuine
  - c) Smile, shake their hand firmly and look them in the eyes
  - d) Avoid bunny trails
  - e) All of the above

For continuing education credit, complete this test and send the answer section at the bottom of the page to:

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- After your test has been graded, you will receive a certificate of completion.
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- Credit: IHS designates this professional and development activity for one (1) continuing education credit.
- Fees: \$29.00 IHS member  
 \$59.00 non-member  
 (Payment in U.S. funds only)

## 12-STEP CLOSING PROCESS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State/Province \_\_\_\_\_ Zip/Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Office Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Last Four Digits of SS/SI# \_\_\_\_\_

Professional and/or Academic Credentials \_\_\_\_\_

Please check one:  \$29.00 (IHS member)  \$59.00 (non-member)

Payment:  Check Enclosed (payable to IHS)

Charge to:  American Express  Visa  MasterCard  Discover

Card Holder Name \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

### ANSWER SECTION

(Check the correct response from the test questions above.)

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3	<input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D <input type="checkbox"/> E	8	<input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D <input type="checkbox"/> E
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